

MORRISSEY: Was he of great help to you?

AYRES: Yes. Yes. Of course, Ray was a great help in getting the primary cleared prior to my actually being the nominee, and then he was very helpful in getting what fund-raising we had, which was very minor. And also his advice and counsel about who to get into the campaigns-- some of the respected people who wondered who is this young fellow--helped get some stability behind it. In fact, he suggested the fellow who became our campaign manager, later became a judge, Judge McKee, so he was able to add a lot of credibility to a candidacy which an awful lot of people doubted to begin with.

And then, of course, after I was elected, then all the time that I was there, I considered Ray Bliss the one person that I could turn to if I needed any assistance, whether it was a little extra money for the campaign, or whether it was getting someone who was in the business community to lay off. I remember in 1958, when I took the position against Governor Bricker and O'Neill, and Ray had fought with the Chamber of Commerce to keep the right-to-work law off the ballot. He thought that was just absurd for them to put it on and make such a fight out of it because it was going to remove O'Neill and Bricker, and possibly several congressmen. Well, it did remove several congressmen. So I took my position early and told Ray what I was going to do and he said, "Well, I just wish Bricker and O'Neill would do the same thing." He said, "We can put the party back together after this, but we can't put O'Neill back in the governor's seat and John Bricker back in his senate seat." So Ray told the local people there, "Look, Ayres is doing the right thing." So he kept the element that were gung-ho for the right-to-work off my back and if Ray had not done that, it might have split them so they would have taken it out on me just on a single issue. Now, of course, Ray was always at the right place at the right time. After the '64 debacle, who wanted to be chairman?

We had just gotten beat in the worst beating in modern times, and we'd lost the House and Senate, we'd lost the governors' races, but there was no place to go but up, so Ray stepped in and put the party back together and kept the element of the Nixon-Rockefeller-Reagan group of '68 very neutral. As far as he was concerned, he didn't really take any side, and I don't think he really had any. In fact, he might have leaned toward Rockefeller, if the truth were known, but that would be for Ray to say. And then Nixon got elected and Ray was the national chairman and was in the seat at the time. "I think Ray was really hurt, and I was hurt and told Nixon so in no uncertain terms, when Ray was dumped. And he was. There was no other word for it. He was dumped because Nixon, by nature, is

[AYRES] going to run the whole show. He's going to know what's going on. He knew he couldn't dictate to a national chairman. Ray was not one to go on television. He was a nuts and bolts organization man. He thought that's how the party should be run, and it hurt him when Nixon removed him. I think Nixon's personality, some of his quirks came out then. That's the reason I was one who felt he knew all about Watergate, because Nixon was so curious he had to know about everything. And he couldn't know about everything if Ray was running the national committee. Ray would say, "No, this is it. This is what we're doing. This is what we're going to do." He wasn't reporting to the president. He thought he was a little separate from that. So Nixon wanted to put his own man in.

MORRISSEY: What's at the heart of Bliss' effectiveness?

AYRES: Organization, which is so true. They talk about building the party from the ground up and that's what Ray did--that was his strong point.

MORRISSEY: A citizen base?

AYRES: Yes.

MORRISSEY: I assume a heavy input of volunteers?

AYRES: That's right. And Ray was one of the first ones in the country to realize the power of the women in doing the work. He had a great women's organization.

MORRISSEY: I would judge that probably the two most successful and well-known political party leaders of recent years have been Ray Bliss on the Republican side and John Bailey on the Democratic side.

AYRES: Yes. And their operations were very similar to the extent that they believed in an organization. Now Bailey was more inclined to make deals, I think, than Ray. I'm not familiar with the Democratic operation and perhaps I'm judging it too quickly, but it looked to me as though Bailey, particularly in Connecticut where he was the strong arm, named the candidates and kept others out. Ray did a somewhat similar thing in Ohio. Ray did not like primary fights, and he did everything he possibly could to prevent them.

MORRISSEY: Bailey was very sensitive to the ethnic factor. I don't know if Bliss was.

AYRES: Oh, yes.

MORRISSEY: Bliss was?

AYRES: Very much so. Yes. In fact, Ray, while he was state chairman, going out talking to other state chairmen, cited our congressional campaign for the value of the ethnic support.

MORRISSEY: Which comes through, incidentally, in that Life magazine story. I was amazed at how many of the youngsters photographed have eastern European names.

AYRES: Oh, yes.

MORRISSEY: I don't know if it was deliberate, or did it just happen that way?

AYRES: No, that was the makeup of it.

MORRISSEY: It's very typical of Lorain, I suppose?

AYRES: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Did you get to know John Bricker at all?

AYRES: Yes. Got to know John very well. In fact, in 1958, when this right-to-work thing was up and John was defeated, I saw that our polls showed us ahead and we had a comparatively weak opponent. The position I had taken on the right-to-work was helping me. The last two weeks of the campaign when we had our rally, we sort of turned it into a John Bricker rally, and John felt that night that he was going to squeeze through, which he didn't. One of the strongest things John Bricker had going for him was his ability to express himself and he looked like most people think a senator should.

MORRISSEY: You mentioned that as a young man, you got to know the then judge, Frank Lausche. Did you know him as governor? As senator?

AYRES: Oh, yes. Yes. He came to Akron quite frequently. I knew him well as governor. When he became governor, I had occasion to work with him on some of the state problems, and, of course, on the redistricting, too, which came up when he was governor. Then when he went to the Senate, we had the Ohio delegation meeting with the senators and I had nothing of really grave importance to work with him on, but always found him very cooperative, very sincere in his efforts.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever consider running state-wide for governor or senator?

AYRES: No. I enjoyed the little niche that I had and I really wasn't motivated to seek higher office. To me there just wasn't a whole lot more you could do as a senator than you could as a House member as far as getting things done was concerned. The privilege of the floor of the House is just as potent as in the Senate, although the senator can get more publicity. But if you've got a good issue, and a little ingenuity, you can get the publicity on the issue anyway. And that really didn't mean that much. The pay's the same. Frankly, unless you had some independent means or wanted to be subsidized, it's pretty costly to operate state-wide in a state the size of Ohio.

MORRISSEY: Was there at any time the threat that your district would go through a major redistricting? Really change the complexion . . .

AYRES: Well, it was a threat all the time. And it did go through major changes. It started with the four counties, and we wouldn't have won without them, and then they cut it down to two counties, then they cut it down to one county . . .

MORRISSEY: They being the Democratic-controlled legislature?

AYRES: Sometimes Democratic, and sometimes the Republicans. They had to because of the population change.

MORRISSEY: But what role, if any, can the incumbent congressman exert in trying to control the process of redistricting?

AYRES: Very, very little if the population figures are against him. The only thing I insisted was that a large Republican ward, Ward 8, should stay in the district.

MORRISSEY: In Akron?

AYRES: In Akron. And that the city of Cuyahoga Falls, which was leaning more Republican, should stay in. Of course, I was very strong in Barberton, which was a Democratic city. The district was changed--let's see--seven times in twenty years.

MORRISSEY: So you have the continuing problem of trying to get yourself identified in the newer segments of the district?

AYRES: No, I never got any new areas.

MORRISSEY: Oh, it was always taken away from you?

AYRES: It was always taken away. So finally it boiled down to where I only had Akron and Cuyahoga Falls.

MORRISSEY: I see.

AYRES: And then a couple of little outlying townships. It boiled down to just part of Summit County, where it had started out with four counties.

MORRISSEY: And the region was growing that much?

AYRES: No, but we started out with such an abundance. See, we had nearly 800,000 at that time, so they cut it back to 600,000, then they cut it back to 500, then they cut it back to 450 and then they cut it back to 425.

MORRISSEY: Did the Republican members of the Ohio delegation try to stand together on issues, vote together?

AYRES: We met weekly on issues affecting the state, yes, we were pretty solid. But there were always a few deviations in votes that didn't affect the state.

MORRISSEY: How about the delegation as a whole?

AYRES: They tried to be solid, but it was pretty difficult. We had some people like myself, Frances Bolton, and George Bender, Harry McGregor--pretty independent thinkers.

MORRISSEY: It was not only one of the largest delegations in the country, but very divided in terms of Republicans and Democrats.

AYRES: Yes, it is now. Of course, the Republicans have lost considerable ground. I remember one delegation meeting that we had right after the Puerto Ricans shot up the Congress. I happened to be sitting that day next to Frances Bolton and Clarence Brown, who had a great sense of humor and was always needling Mrs. Bolton and myself because we were usually the two that might deviate a little from the Clarence Brown position. . . . But the shooting was rather interesting that day because as one fellow said, there were only five members shot, but according to the press releases put out, there were sixty members seated next to a member who was shot. Of course, I don't think there were many more than that on the floor in that section where the bullets went. Anyway, I was seated next to Frances Bolton when the thing first

[AYRES] started up. I thought somebody had shot off a pack of firecrackers, and I saw a splinter in just a split second, go off the table there and I immediately hit the floor. And I wasn't too brave. I didn't stand up and lift Frances down to the floor, but I reached around and got hold of her leg and pulled her down and then she said, "Billy, what are you doing?" And I said, "Don't be foolish, Frances. Those are bullets." And she said, "Oh, oh." So there we were down underneath the seat there and it was all over, you know, in a few seconds. But Clarence Brown, at the meeting that next day for the delegation, said, "Well, wouldn't you know, there was Bill, protecting Frances so he'd have somebody to blame his vote on." [Laughter.]

MORRISSEY: Why don't we stop on that one? Thank you very much.